

# Coconino County Issues Public Health Emergency Declaration, Pet Quarantine for Plague

(Sept. 21, 2:05 p.m.) An outbreak of plague involving prairie dogs is occurring in the Continental Country Club and Doney Park areas. The communities are located in the eastern areas of Flagstaff in Coconino County.

Rodents in the Doney Park and Continental Country Club areas have died from the disease and left behind infected fleas. Coconino County Health Department (CCHD) officials are closely monitoring and responding to this situation. Response has included flea collecting and testing, and extensive prevention education and outreach to people in affected areas.

The discovery of the reduction of prairie dog activity and the positive flea tests has prompted the Coconino County Board of Supervisors to issue a Public Health Emergency Declaration.

"The Emergency Declaration is a response necessary for the health department to begin immediate expanded flea control measures. We do not want homeowners to panic, rather they should follow the prevention measures that are provided and allow our staff to access property where the disease is known to be present," said Barbara Worgess, CCHD Director.

In addition to the Declaration, the Board has issued a pet quarantine in these areas to include:

- Doney Park, in an area defined by Neptune Drive on the north, Stardust Trail on the east, Silver Saddle Road on the south, and Koch Field on the west;
- Continental Country Club/Campbell Mesa, in an area defined by Interstate 40 to the north, the east line of Section 8 (including the Campbell Mesa trail system) to the east, the southerly edge of private property along Old Walnut Canyon Road to the U.S.F.S. boundary and including all of Section 20 (State Land) and residential areas north of Butler Avenue to the south, and Fourth Street to the west (including the undeveloped land between the golf course and Interstate 40).

The quarantine, which begins today, Friday, Sept. 21, 2007, places restrictions on cats and dogs in all areas within the designated area. The quarantine will remain in effect for up to 45 days.

The quarantine restrictions are as follows:

- All cats and dogs must be confined within an enclosure or secured on the owner's property; or when not on the owner's property, pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet. Cats or dogs found at-large in the area may be impounded.

What is Plague?

Plague is an acute infection of rodents, rabbits and certain carnivorous animals caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. Plague can be transmitted to humans either by flea-bites or by direct contact with infected animal tissues during skinning or handling of game animals. In rare cases, plague can be spread from person-to-person, or cat-to-person, by pneumonic (airborne) transmission. People or animals (particularly cats) infected with plague pneumonia can transmit the bacteria by coughing or sneezing in the face of another person or animal.

Plague is a treatable disease and responds to appropriate antibiotic therapy. Early diagnosis is the key to effective treatment. Symptoms of plague often include high fever, chills, weakness, headache, nausea, and frequently a painful, enlarged lymph node in the groin area or armpit. Persons with these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention, especially if they have been recently exposed to fleas, rodents, rabbits, or sick cats in areas where plague may be active.

A reduction in rodent activity, such as prairie dogs and mice, may indicate that plague is present. Persons noticing a sudden reduction of rodent activity are urged to contact CCHD Environmental Services at 928-226-2741.

A total of 48 cases of plague have been reported in Arizona during the last 30 years (1977-2006). Eight cases were fatal. The plague risk has been relatively low during the last six years due to drought conditions and high summer temperatures.

There has been one human cases of plague reported in Arizona this year and no human cases of plague in Coconino County since 1996. The CCHD is urging the public to take precautions to reduce their risk of exposure to this serious disease.

In Arizona, plague activity can occur in areas above 4,500 feet in elevation, but its occurrence is not always predictable. For this reason, campers, hunters, hikers and others visiting or living in areas above 4,500 feet should take the following precautions to avoid plague exposures:

1. DO NOT HANDLE SICK OR DEAD ANIMALS.
2. PREVENT PETS FROM ROAMING LOOSE. Pets picking up the infected fleas of wild animals, then passing on the

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fleas to their human owners is one of the common ways for humans to contract plague. Cats with plague can also pass the disease on to humans directly thorough respiratory droplets

3. DE-FLEA PETS ROUTINELY. Contact your veterinarian for specific recommendations.
4. AVOID EXPOSURE TO RODENT BURROWS AND FLEAS.
5. USE INSECT REPELLENTS when visiting or working in areas where plague might be active or rodents might be present (Campers, Hikers, Woodcutters).
6. WEAR RUBBER GLOVES when cleaning and skinning wild animals.
7. DO NOT camp next to rodent burrows and avoid sleeping directly on the ground.
8. BE AWARE that unlike dogs, cats are highly susceptible to this disease, and while they can get sick from a variety of illnesses, a sick cat (especially one allowed to run at large outside) should receive care by a veterinarian for proper diagnosis and treatment to reduce human exposure to plague.
9. IN CASE OF ILLNESS (SYMPTOMS PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED), SEE YOUR PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY.

For more information, call the Coconino County Health Department at 928-522-7800 or toll-free 1-877-522-7800.

(Source: Coconino County)